



National Inventors Hall of Fame®

Senate Education Committee Hearing on House Bill 96 (State Operating Budget)

Testimony of Sophia Johnson, Associate Director, Government Relations National Inventors Hall of Fame May 14, 2025

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony on House Bill 96 today. My name is Sophia Johnson, and I am the Associate Director of Government Relations at the National Inventors Hall of Fame in North Canton, Ohio.

For over 50 years, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has been at the forefront of illuminating the legacies of world-changing inventors and preparing the next generation of scientists, inventors and scholars. We partner with the United States Patent and Trademark Office to honor our Hall of Fame Inductees whose inventions have made a positive impact on the world and to provide youth with creative, hands-on learning experiences through summer, in-school and afterschool STEM programming.

Camp Invention is our flagship summer program. It launched 35 years ago and has since grown its national reach to impact over 120,000 students in grades K-6 last year alone. This includes over 14,000 young Ohioans from 146 schools or districts across 39 counties in the Buckeye State.

The STEM curriculum for Camp Invention aligns with Ohio's science learning standards, and there is data showing a single week at Camp Invention can improve students' math and reading test scores, school attendance and college aspirations. Facilitated by local Ohio educators, the program not only provides teachers with valuable professional development opportunities but also fosters a supportive learning environment where students engage with challenges and develop the resilience, creativity and problem-solving skills needed to become future innovators and entrepreneurs.

Since 2022, the National Inventors Hall of Fame has received funding from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce's Summer Learning and Afterschool Opportunities Grant. We understand DEW developed this grant in part by leveraging post-COVID federal dollars received via the American Rescue Plan Act (also known as the ARPA—ESSER Fund). The National Inventors Hall of Fame used this grant funding to expand the number of students who have access to Camp Invention. In fact, our nonprofit reached 843 students in 20 different school districts in 2024 thanks to the state's support.

Maintaining this broader reach (predominantly within low-income communities) is unfortunately in jeopardy given that the federal funding has dried up. Without replacement



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funding to fill this gap, it will become more challenging for Camp Invention to continue offering its robust STEM programming to as many students and school districts in future years.

Thankfully, the Ohio House recognized the value of Camp Invention and the positive impact it has on STEM education by adding a \$250,000 yearly appropriation for Camp Invention in DEW's project and program support line item. This appropriation will increase access to STEM curricula for families and students who otherwise would be unable to participate by requiring the National Inventors Hall of Fame use state funding to help enroll more low-income students into our successful STEM-focused summer camp.

The state's support of Camp Invention in fiscal years 2026 and 2027 will similarly enable the expansion of Camp Invention in new school districts statewide, which in turn will result in more students having the ability to spend a week embracing our hands-on curriculum that is backed by over 25 years of evaluation data.

We thank DEW and the legislature for its support over the past several years, and on behalf of our organization and the students and families we serve, we urge you to maintain the National Inventors Hall of Fame's appropriation in House Bill 96. Our modest request will help give hundreds of young Ohioans access to high-quality summer camp programming that can kick-start their interest in STEM — while also leading them toward a successful career.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome any questions from the committee.